

## Quick Facts

### About...Strep throat

#### What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection caused by group A *Streptococcus* bacteria, which are very common among children and teenagers. It is important to note that not all sore throats are caused by this bacterium. Most sore throats are actually caused by viruses, which usually clear on their own without medical treatment.

#### How is strep throat spread?

Bacteria that cause strep throat are easily spread through the air by sneezing or coughing. Bacteria can also be spread by touching doorknobs or other contaminated surfaces or shaking hands, then touching the nose or mouth where they can cause infection.

#### Who is at risk for strep throat?

Strep throat is most common among school-age children and teenagers; it is less common among adults. Children younger than 3 years of age rarely get strep throat. The infection occurs most often during the school year when children are in large groups together, but it can occur anytime during the year.

#### How do I know if I have strep throat?

The most common symptom of strep throat is a red and painful sore throat. Other symptoms include:

- fever
- difficulty swallowing
- red and enlarged tonsils
- white patches in the throat or on the tonsils
- tender or swollen glands in the neck
- loss of appetite and nausea

#### How is strep throat diagnosed?

Your health care provider may perform a rapid strep test in the office. Using a cotton swab, your health care provider will take a sample of fluids from the back of your throat. This test takes only about 5 minutes. If the rapid test is negative, your health care provider may take another specimen for a culture to make sure you do not really have strep throat. These test results are available in 1-2 days.

#### How can strep throat be treated?

Strep throat is normally treated with antibiotics for one to two weeks. These antibiotics will reduce the length and severity of the symptoms, as well as the risk of complications. After about 24 hours of taking the antibiotics, you should see a drop in temperature and will no longer be contagious. Other symptoms should start to go away by the second or third day of antibiotic treatment. Even if you begin to feel better, it is very important to finish the antibiotic prescription, since the bacteria can remain in the throat and symptoms can return. Finishing the entire course of antibiotics also helps to reduce the chance for antibiotic resistance to develop.

### **Are there any complications that can occur with strep throat?**

Although scarlet fever rarely occurs in the United States, when it does, it usually occurs following a case of strep throat. Scarlet fever has many of the same symptoms as strep throat, plus a sunburn-like rash that feels like sandpaper. For more information on scarlet fever, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/scarletfever\\_g.htm#whatis](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/scarletfever_g.htm#whatis)

Other complications of strep throat include:

- Rheumatic fever
- Ear infections
- Sinus infections
- Certain types of kidney problems

Treatment with antibiotics almost always eliminates the chance of these complications happening. Complications from strep throat are very rare in the United States.

### **How is strep throat prevented?**

Strep throat can be prevented by practicing good personal hygiene. Proper hand cleaning is the best way to prevent strep throat and many other types of infections. It is important to clean your hands regularly and to teach your children how to clean their hands properly, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Covering your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing can also help prevent the spread of this disease. Do not share eating or drinking utensils, especially with a person known to be infected with strep throat. People with strep throat should stay home from school, daycare, or work until they have been on antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

For more information on strep throat, please visit to the CDC Web site at:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal_g.htm)

or the Mayo Clinic Web site at:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/strep-throat/DS00260>

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